# Press Release | 26 November 2025

**Two women in scrubs standing in front of a large screen

AI-generated content may be incorrect.**

**Two NHS workers thanked for combined 75 years of service**

A person wearing a blue scrubs

AI-generated content may be incorrect.**The QEH is celebrating two NHS heroes who have dedicated 75 years between them to caring for patients.**

The two colleagues work in the Arthur Levin Day Surgery Unit (DSU) looking after patients who need to come into hospital for an operation.

Sheila Burton, 68, a Theatre Practitioner has an incredible 50 years of service in the NHS.

She began her career at the young age of 18 at Barnet General Hospital in 1975, back when Barbara Sreisand was topping the charts. She was as an Auxiliary Nurse – now known as a Healthcare Assistant – before she began her formal nurse training.

****Sheila said: “I come from a family of nurses – my dad was a nurse in the army, and his sister was a nurse too. My mum's two sisters were also nurses, so it's always been in my blood. My dad was always so influential to me – he also taught nursing, and I was inspired by him from a very early age.”

After qualifying as a State Enrolled Nurse in 1978, Sheila worked with children and later at the Coppetts Wood Hospital isolation unit in North London. From there Sheila moved to Day Surgery at the Royal Free Hospital in Hampstead. Her career then took her to Lincolnshire and then to Wisbech, where she moved into theatres.

In 1995 she completed her conversion to Registered General Nurse status, and in 1999 she joined the newly opened Arthur Levin Day Surgery Unit at The QEH. 25 years later, she remains a much-loved member of the team.

Reflecting on her long NHS career, Sheila said: “I love caring for people, there is nothing more rewarding than nursing someone back to health. And the people I've worked with over the years have been amazing too. I've met so many people and made so many great friends along my journey. I love coming into work every day.”

Sheila is a mother of one and lives in Wisbech with her husband Steve and their two cats, Alvin and Eartha. She plans to retire next summer to spend time gardening, reading and walking.

Melanie Blackburn, who retires this month on her 60th birthday, is celebrating 25 years at The QEH.

Melanie began her nurse training in 1997 at The QEH School of Nursing at the age of 34, qualifying in 2000. She worked on a hospital ward before joining the Day Surgery Unit (DSU) in 2003, where she spent 10 years on the ward before moving into DSU Theatres in 2013.

Speaking about her career, Melanie said: “My heart has always been in theatres and I've loved every minute of my time here. In particular, I've really enjoyed working closely with the vascular team and helping to transform the service offered here at the hospital.”

Melanie, who lives in Dereham with her husband, has two children and three grandchildren. She is looking forward to retirement, where she’ll spend more time sewing in a bespoke garden room her husband is building for her.

Her retirement will also include a dream three-month adventure across Canada, inspired by the TV series Race Across the World. The journey will begin at Niagara Falls, continue through the Canadian Rockies to Banff and Jasper National Parks, then on to Vancouver, ending with an Alaskan cruise.

Matthew Cooper, Day Surgery Theatre Manager, praised Sheila and Melanie’s contribution: “Sheila and Melanie are the heartbeat of our Day Surgery Unit. Their compassion, skill and commitment have shaped the service and inspired countless colleagues. We are incredibly proud to celebrate their remarkable achievements and thank them for everything they have brought to our team.”

John Syson, Director of People, added: “Both 50 and 25 years of NHS service are extraordinary milestones. I’d like to thank Sheila and Melanie for their incredible long service, compassion and professionalism and I’m sure many of their patients would thank them as well.”

Interim Executive Managing Director, Chris Bown, who gave the duo a special long service award said: “It was a privilege to present Sheila and Melanie with their long service awards. They are what makes the NHS special, unwavering commitment to patient care and an incredible sense of teamwork”

**Ends. Notes to editors;** For media enquiries only, please contact Communications Team, [media.enquiries@qehkl.nhs.uk](mailto:media.enquiries@qehkl.nhs.uk) or 01553 613216. For all other enquiries, please contact QEH Switchboard on 01553 613613.